



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## WITCH-FINDING IN WESTERN MARYLAND.<sup>1</sup>

SUMMER before last there was a great apple crop in Frederick County. Everybody made apple-butter. Now, an apple-butter boiling, though shorn of much of its former glory as a social event, is yet an important function. I had the pleasure of assisting at more than one. Many a tale of the olden time, and many an uncanny experience were exchanged over the "*cider and the schnitts*," and I realized that here, at least, tradition and local influences still held their own against books.

Over the great copper kettle one night an old man remarked, as he stirred its seething wholesome contents, that we did n't hear much of witchcraft nowadays, but when he was young, there was a good deal of that business going on. His own father had been changed into a horse, and ridden to the witches' ball. All the witches, as they arrived, turned into beautiful ladies, but he remained a horse, and so far and so fast was he ridden, and so sore and bruised was he the next day in his own proper person, that he could n't do a stroke of work for two weeks.

Aunt Susan remembered well this adventure of her father-in-law. Her own father always kept a big bunch of sweetbrier switches hanging at the head of his bed. And many a night she had heard him "slashing away at the old witches that would n't let him sleep."

Progressive farming has about improved the sweetbrier off the face of the earth. But old beliefs are not so easily uprooted, as the stories that followed will testify.

Some of the stories at these gatherings are as follows :—

When Grandmother Eiler was young she had a cow of her own raising, of which she was very proud. One evening at milking time, a certain woman passed through the barnyard, stopped, and looked the cow all over. "I was foolish enough to tell her all about the cow, how gentle she was, how much milk she was giving, and all that, and she said I certainly had a fine cow. Well, the next morning that cow could n't stand on her feet, and there she lay in the stable till father came home from the mountain, where he was cutting wood. He said it was all plain enough, when I told him everything, but he wondered I had n't had better sense. However, he knew just what to do. He rubbed the cow all over with assafoetida, saying words all the time. And the next day, when I went into the barn, there she stood on her four legs, eating like a hound. Witches can't stand assafoetida."

<sup>1</sup> Read at the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the American Folk-Lore Society, Baltimore, December 28, 1900.

It was this witch woman who, going to a neighbor's one day on an errand, prolonged her stay without apparent reason, till it was almost night. Though she was very uneasy all the time, and kept saying there was sickness at home and she ought to be there, still she did n't go. Finally, it was discovered that the broom had fallen across the door. When it was taken away, she fairly flew. Of course, this looked very suspicious. But, not to be rash in their judgment, the people of the house sought further proof. So, the next time she came, *salt* was *thrown* under her chair, and there she sat, as though bound until it was removed. Then, as her visits were now considered undesirable, *nails* were driven in her tracks, but the place in the ground marked, in case the footprints became obliterated. It was soon known that she was laid up with sore feet, which refused to heal until the nails were dug up.

Miss K.'s father, when a youth in Germany, had a friend whose rest was disturbed by nightmare. At last he concluded that a witch was troubling him, and proceeded to entrap her by stopping up every crevice and keyhole in the room. (Mindful of the fact, of course, that "for witches this is law, — where they have entered in, there also they withdraw.") The next morning he found a beautiful girl cowering in the cupboard. He put her to work as a servant about the house. But eventually, thinking her reformation complete, he married her and lived happily for several years. Sometimes, though, she would sigh, and say she longed to see beautiful France again. One day she was missing, and her little child, just tall enough to reach the keyhole, told how she had removed the stopping for her. She was never seen again, having of course "taken French leave" through the keyhole. The same story is told of a miller in Frederick County. He, too, domesticated a witch-maiden, having caught her in the same way. But, years after, he incautiously opened the keyhole, and found himself a grass widower.

From Miss K. I have a version of a story told to me, as a child, by Aunt Sarah, very black and very old. She was fond of her pipe. Yes, she learnt to smoke from her mammy, who learnt it from her grandmammy, who was a witch. This grandmother was phthisicky, and often called for her pipe at night, as smoking relieved her. It was her granddaughter's duty to fill her pipe just before going to bed, and also to get up and light it, if necessary. Some nights, though, the grandmother would say, "Guess you need n't fix my pipe to-night; I don't reckon I'll want it," and on those nights, if the granddaughter woke up, she found herself alone, and her mother and grandmother gone.

One night when grandmother had declined her pipe, she only pretended to be asleep, and saw the two women get the lump of rabbit's

fat off the mantelpiece, rub themselves all over, and say, "Up and out and away we go!" The third time, away they flew up the chimney.

She quickly got up, rubbed herself with rabbit's fat, saying, "Up and about and away we go!" And up and about she went, flying around the room, bumping and thumping herself against wall and rafters until daylight. Her "vaulting ambition" was not repressed, however, by this experience. The next time she observed more closely, and saw that her maternal relatives greased themselves with downward strokes, and said, not "Up and *about*," but "Up and *out* and away we go!" She carefully repeated this procedure, and slipped up the chimney after them. Mammy and grandmammy each took a horse out of the field, leaving nothing for her but a yearling. So she took the yearling and rode gloriously till cock-crow.

As Miss K. told this story, the witches slipped out of their skin after the greasing, and the yearling escaped, since there were horses enough to go round. But the misadventure of the witches' apprentices on the first night was the same.

A woman was suspected of bewitching her husband's horse. The animal refused to eat or drink, flying back from the trough in fright, as if struck by something. A neighbor, who claimed to be able to overcome the power of witches, was called in, and after some mysterious muttering, with pacings round the horse and in and out the stall, he gave the horse a kick in the side. At this, the woman, who was looking on, walked away, holding her side, as though *she* felt the effects of the kick. As the man was leaving the farm, the woman crossed his path in the form of a snake, but he avoided her, and escaped harm. He could have killed the snake, but would not, knowing what it was.

This woman's reputation as a witch seems firmly established. I heard many stories of her. She was known as a very industrious, honest woman, not very quarrelsome, but capable of using abusive language when angered. She died but recently.

Miss K. tells a story of her grandfather, who was a famous witch-finder. He was called in once by a farmer who promised him fifty dollars if he could cure a valuable horse that he had reason to think was bewitched. He proceeded to work by taking a hoop off a barrel and passing it over the horse's head, with words known only to himself. He then replaced it and began to hammer it down. "Shall I drive it hard?" he asked the farmer. "Yes," was the reply. "I don't care if you kill the witch!" Just then the farmer's little boy ran out of the house, crying, "Little old Stoke" (the witch-finder's name was Stokes) "my mother says if you don't stop, you'll kill her!" At this the owner of the horse (and of the witch too, as it

turned out) became very angry with Stokes for harming his wife (he evidently held her a little dearer than his horse), and refused to pay the fifty dollars. Miss K. says they went to law about the money. It would be interesting to know if such grounds were allowed and the suit actually entered.

Many stories point to a belief in the evil eye. Children fall sick or cry incessantly after having been admired or caressed by some suspicious person.

The hero of the following tale was surely no faint-heart :—

The pleasure of a young man's visit to a young lady was sadly marred by the ill-timed antics of a black cat, which, every night, would appear in the room and fly about from floor to ceiling in the most surprising manner. Sometimes a black squirrel would relieve the cat, but continue the acrobatic performance. All the time there was a terrific accompaniment, as of droves of rats, scratching and scrambling in the walls and under the floor. At last, being properly advised, he provided himself with a pistol and a silver bullet, stopped up the keyhole, and waited. But that night the cat did n't come back, nor the squirrel, and the powers of darkness no longer interfered with the course of true love. The lady in the case, mindful of her own difficulties, no doubt, now *tries* for witches with great success.

Note that it takes a *silver* bullet to bring down a witch. You have only to aim at her picture and the ball will take effect wherever she may be. And as I was advised, "If you can't get hold of her photograph, just draw off her profile on the end of the barn, and shoot at that."

Your silver bullet is easily made by beating up a silver quarter or ten-cent piece. (The moulding of the silver bullet in "Der Freischütz" will be recalled.) Witches' bullets are of pith or hair, and are often found in the bodies of animals that have fallen victims to their spells.

While I had not the pleasure of personal acquaintance with a witch or warlock, the promise is mine of introduction to two in good and regular standing.

One, a dweller in the Fox Hills, is the proud possessor of a book which nobody can read. But it is chiefly as the "nephew of his uncle" that he is known to fame. This uncle of fearsome memory—among many advantages he possessed over the common run of people was entire independence of police protection or burglar-alarms—never turned a key in his house, his barn, or his corn-crib. For, if any persons came on his premises with evil intentions, they were held there foot-fast until morning, or such time as he was pleased to release them. Men have been found standing under his

apple-trees with open but empty sacks, begging to be freed and sent away.

The other notable, whom I hope to meet next summer, lives on the edge of the Owl Swamp. He was characterized "as about the best man we have left in that line."

But it is comfort to know that, if a witch hath power to charm, there be those also who can "unlock the clasp charm, and thaw the spell." And this power does not reside in professionals only; anybody, in fact, who knows how, can "try" for a witch. Of course, some people, having a natural gift that way, are more successful than others. They are possibly more ingenious in devising punishments.

But certain conditions must be observed by everybody in all cases. Most important is the time for the trial. This must be within nine days after the spell has been detected.

Persons of small invention had better confine themselves to old, reliable methods like the following:—

If the cow's milk is n't good, throw the milking into the fire, or heat stones and drop them into the milk, or cut and slash the milk with knives. If this does not bring the witch to terms, she will be obliged to suffer severe pains, as from cutting or bruising.

If your baking fail, burn a loaf. The witch will come to you, seeking to borrow. Give her nothing at all, bite, sup, nor greeting. For, if she obtain anything from you, even a word, no counter-charm of yours will avail to lift the spell.

I happened to be present when an old lady, who had been away visiting, was asked for news of friends down the country.

"Oh," she said, "I did n't get to see them. I was on my way to their house when some one told that their cow had died, and they were trying for the witch. Of course I did n't go then."

Aunt Betsy knew well that, had she gone, silence and the cold shoulder would have been her portion, even though she were not among the suspects. For, at this critical time, the social amenities are in complete abeyance and hospitality in eclipse.

When Mr. F.'s child was taken with crying spells at night, he stood it as long as he could, but, being a workingman, as he said, he could n't afford to lose his rest. So, when all remedies failed, he decided that the child was tormented and he must try for the witch; especially, as his wife admitted having met an old woman some days before, who admired and caressed the child. His preparations were elaborate, but, neglecting to take his mother-in-law into his confidence, they failed. For, when the witch came a-borrowing, she accommodated her. Otherwise, he assured me, the witch's punishment would have been dire: "*She would have busted!*"

Another man's well-laid scheme went wrong because he could n't hold his tongue. His cattle had died unaccountably. So he built a pyre of brush and cord-wood and began to burn the bodies.

Soon, across the field, a woman was seen, circling round in her approach to the fire. At last her clothing nearly touched the flame. "Gad!" but that was close!" he exclaimed. Instantly she shot away, released from her punishment.

The year 1899, though a good apple year, was an off one for peaches. But some friends of mine contrived to get a taste at least, which was more than the most of us had. Coming home late one night, these young men passed a place where the only peaches in the neighborhood were said to be. They all "felt for peaches," as their peculiar idiom has it, and the coincidence of opportunity with capacity struck them all. But the owner of the peaches was likewise the owner of a savage dog, that, howling as he prowled, seemed to realize that eternal vigilance was the price of peaches. But one of the party bethought him how to lay the dog. He took his pocket-knife and drove the blade into a stake of the stake-and-rider fence, saying three times, "Dog, keep your mouth shut until I release you."

In the language of an eye-witness, "That dog nearly tore his toenails off getting to the back of the house. And there he stayed, with never a word out of him, until we had all the peaches we wanted. Of course, we only took a few to eat. As Jake pulled the knife out, the dog flew around the house again, raging like mad, and we made good time down the road!"

These young men had no thought of stealing. "A few to eat" custom allowed them. For they, like the rest of this community, are self-respecting, substantial farmer-folk. Descendants of Germans who settled in Frederick County about the middle of the last century, they are still remarkably homogeneous. Their surnames, though badly corrupted as to spelling, preserve the German sound, and German idioms persist in their English speech. For their folk-lore, therefore, we may assume a Teutonic origin, especially, as the negro element is almost entirely lacking in this particular section of the county. The people, having mostly small holdings of land, never were slave-owners.

*Elisabeth Cloud Seip.*

BALTIMORE, MD.